

## **Stand Up. Speak Out. Make it Okay to Say.**

### **TCOG unveils Okay to Say in the Workplace Initiative**

SHERMAN, APRIL 19, 2018 – Susan B. Thomas, Executive Director of Texoma Council of Governments (TCOG) made an announcement today that TCOG is proud to join the efforts of the Texoma Behavioral Leadership Team (TBHLT) in reducing the stigma of mental health by unveiling an Okay to Say initiative within the workplace. This announcement coincides with the release of TCOG's newly-redesigned website which features details of the Okay to Say movement.

"Reducing the stigma around issues related to mental health is not only the right thing to do from a human perspective, but it's the smart thing to do from an employment perspective," explains Dr. Thomas.

"Creating a work environment in which employees know it's okay to say they are struggling with depression or anxiety or any other mental health issue while at the same time providing employer-sponsored resources to help them address those issues is absolutely in the best interest of any organization."

TCOG's Public Information & Media Manager Sean Norton explained TCOG's role within the TBHLT is to help develop procedural tools which can be utilized by other organizations in the region for implementing Okay to Say in their own workplaces and to also help increase public awareness of the TBHLT's primary objectives.

Norton stated, "We want our staff to know and understand that their wellness is one of our top priorities, and we want our community to know the same thing. We're helping to reduce the stigma of mental health by fostering a culture of compassion and understanding within the workplace, providing our staff with access to appropriate programs through our benefits package, and access to resources through our internal communication tools."

By featuring Okay to Say on TCOG's updated website, Norton says his hope is to encourage other organizations – both public and private – to join the statewide movement and also assist the TBHLT in reducing the stigma of mental health in Texoma. You can view the redesigned website by visiting [www.tcog.com](http://www.tcog.com).

TCOG joins Texoma Health Foundation (THF) and the Child & Family Guidance Center (CFGF) of Texoma in implementing the Okay to Say program within the workplace.

"Okay to Say in the Workplace is a perfect addition to the Texoma Health Foundation and our efforts to build a workplace supporting mental health and wellness. We are in our tenth week of Emotional Brain Training (EBT) by Laurel Mellin, PhD with support from Bill Mory, EdS. and will now be adding the Texoma Behavioral Health Leadership Team's Okay to Say in the Workplace program.

We are so proud of the work of the Texoma Behavioral Health Leadership Team and TCOG. There are more great things ahead," said Michelle Lemming, President/CEO of THF.

When asked for comment, CFGF Executive Director Brenda Hayward, replied, "CFGF is a trauma-informed care mental health provider in the Texoma region that embraces the Okay to Say message to Stand Up, Speak Out and Make it Okay to Say. We are committed to the mission of reducing stigma around mental health. CFGF values and promotes self-care of all employees providing a safe, caring

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and compassionate workplace in which employees feel supported. We are proud to be a part of this great movement across the state of Texas.”

“Since the inaugural meeting of the Texoma Behavioral Health Leadership Team, reducing the stigma that surrounds mental illness has been a priority cause. The Okay to Say program hits that target head on, and as we extend it institutionally throughout the community, those same principles will be integrated in a systemic fashion. Congratulations to Texoma Council of Governments on being one of the first organizations to not only implement the Okay to Say program in its workplace, but also to design an implementation methodology for other groups to follow. Kudos to TCOG!” Gail Utter, NEWCO co-founder stated.

Thomas added, “TCOG’s leadership foundation is built on trust, support, commitment, and courage. If we expect our employees to live and work by those principles, as an organization we are obligated to do the same for them. Becoming an Okay to Say workplace lets our employees know we celebrate their courage in speaking up about the problems they face; we trust them, we’re committed to them, and we’re going to support them through their struggle.”

Okay to Say™ is a community-based movement initiated by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute to increase public awareness about mental health issues in Texas, dispel biases and stereotypes, and break down cultural barriers surrounding mental illness in Texas and beyond. For more information, please visit [www.texasstateofmind.org](http://www.texasstateofmind.org)

The Texoma Council of Governments is a voluntary association of the local governments in Cooke, Fannin, and Grayson Counties. Established in 1968, the Texoma Council of Governments promotes economy and efficiency in the coordinated planning and development of the tri-county region through its community and economic development activities. Either directly, or through contractors, the Council provides housing, utility assistance, and weatherization services for low-income citizens in the region and assists the elderly through a variety of Area Agency on Aging programs. The Council also facilitates the delivery of grant funding for homeland security and criminal justice.

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